

*** NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA ***
*** Number 45: Weather Clients ***

The weather today is miserable, wet and cold. That's all right, I'm tucked inside with a mug of tea and the heater blazing. If you're an amateur meteorologist or just someone who doesn't want to get stuck in a storm, the Internet can be a fantastic tool for watching the weather. You can use a weather web site or a specialized client.

Web sites are great for getting satellite pictures of the weather, temperature statistics and occasional info about faraway conditions before a trip. My favorite weather web site -- and the one that's been around the longest -- is Weather Underground at <http://www.wunderground.com>. The Weather Channel cable television station also offers a nice site, at <http://www.weather.com>. Yet another fine site is from AccuWeather, at <http://www.accuweather.com>.

For day-to-day monitoring of the local weather, a specialized client can be preferable. These programs download information about the current weather conditions from an Internet server and display that information on your screen. They can be set to get updates automatically throughout the day and night.

A friend of mine is a private pilot and uses a weather client to monitor the conditions in the hours before takeoff. There are plenty of other reasons to appreciate the ability to get up-to-date weather info from the Internet -- such as knowing whether to grab an umbrella on your way out the door.

WetSock is a favorite weather client for Windows. WetSock puts an icon in the system tray. When you hover your cursor over the icon, the current temperature and conditions appear as a tooltip -- it's "Cloudy 55 degrees F" in my home town. Clicking on the icon delivers a more detailed look at the weather, including humidity level, wind speed and direction, barometer, and precipitation. One more click reveals the forecast from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: "TODAY...OCCASIONAL SHOWERS THIS MORNING AND AGAIN BY MID AFTERNOON. HIGHS IN THE MID 50S TO LOWER 60S..."

The program will fetch new weather info for your area once an hour, a setting you can tune to your liking. (It's smart enough to only try to update its information when you're connected to the Internet.) WetSock can show information on almost 3000 cities worldwide, including 1500 in the United States and 100 in Canada. If stormclouds are looming on the horizon, you'll appreciate WetSock's weather warning alert feature -- the sound of thunder from your computer's speaker will warn you that it may be time to batten down the hatches. WetSock requires Windows 95, 98 or NT. It is \$12 shareware and is available from <http://www.locutuscodeware.com/wetsock.htm>.

There's a fine weather client for Mac users, too, called WeatherTracker. This program has a great interface, showing a graphical thermometer and barometer, wind direction compass and humidity meter for the city you specify. (It's now 53 degrees and still cloudy.) In fact, it offers three different weather windows: analog, digital, and tiny. You can also see the local forecast, the marine forecast and climate data. WeatherTracker is \$15 shareware, available from <http://www.weathertracker.com>.

Planet Earth is a fun little weather program, also for the Mac. It displays an image of a rotating globe, complete with night and day shadows and cloud cover. The program gets the cloud information from the Net, delivering a reasonably accurate picture of the Earth from space. The program is educational and certainly fun. Planet Earth is \$15 shareware, available from <http://www.lunarsoft.com>.

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WetSock (for Windows): <http://www.locutuscodeware.com/wetsock.htm>

WeatherTracker (for Macintosh): <http://www.weathertracker.com>

Planet Earth (for Macintosh): <http://www.lunarsoft.com>

Weather Underground: <http://www.wunderground.com>

The Weather Channel: <http://www.weather.com>

AccuWeather: <http://www.accuweather.com>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet New Users Forum (GO INETNEW) in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

Got comments or ideas for future issues? We want to hear 'em. Just send a message to savetz@compuserve.com (74774,2725).

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